

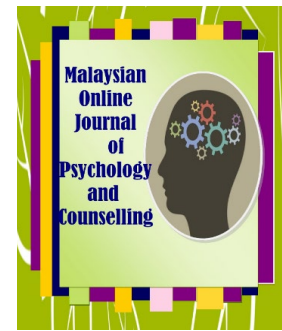
PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND PARENTAL STRESS DURING THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Karabi Chutia¹, Arif Ali^{2*} & Nilesh Maruti Gujar³

ABSTRACT

The parent-child relationship has always been affected by various circumstances. Parent-child relations may have been influenced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on parents had increased parenting stress and has affected parents' relationships with their children. The present study assesses parental stress and parent-child relationship during an outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study was an online cross-sectional survey carried out among 503 parents. The socio-demographic datasheet, Parental Stress Scale (PSS), and Child Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS) were converted into Google Forms and distributed via email, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, etc. as well as social media platforms. Majority (66.2%) of the parents reported moderate parental stress. Closeness was found to be high in the parent-child relationship during the lockdown period. Parental stress showed a significant positive correlation with the conflict domain of CPRS ($r=.525, p<0.001$) whereas a significant negative correlation with the closeness domain of CPRS ($r= -.294, p<0.001$), age ($r= -.188, p<0.001$), and year of marriage ($r= -.122, p<0.01$). The parental-child relationship domain of conflict ($B=.687, t=18.707, p<0.001$) and closeness ($B=-.661, t=-14.094, p<0.001$) contributed significantly to the prediction of parental stress [$F(5,502) = 235.550, p<0.001$] accounting for 49.5% of the variance. COVID-19 has affected parental stress and the parent-child relationship, especially during the lockdown. Psychosocial care programmes and interventions should be planned for parents to uphold stress and the parent-child relationship during crises. Positive parenting and the self-care of parents would serve as promotional and preventative measures. Supporting parents and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 is important.

Keywords: Parental stress, children, parent-child relationship, COVID-19, pandemic, India.



Volume 9 (2),
December 2022

¹ Assam Nursing
Institute,
Titabor, Jorhat,
ASSAM

² Department of
Psychiatric Social Work,
Institute of Human
Behaviour & Allied
Sciences (IHBAS),
Dilshad Garden,
New Delhi,
INDIA

³ Department of
Psychiatric Social Work,
Centre of Excellence for
Mental Health,
INHS Asvini, Colaba,
MUMBAI.

Corresponding Author:
arifalipsw@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

During the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, parenting was the greatest challenge for many parents (Thorell et al., 2021). The children and parents had to live at home during the onset of the COVID-19-related lockdown. The routines of parents and children have affected their functioning and mental health (Brooks et al., 2020). The research finding shows that COVID-19 has brought stress and burnout among parents and is more likely to engage in child abuse and neglect, placing children at risk for detrimental short- and long-term outcomes (Griffith, 2020).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents experience stress specifically related to their roles as parents (Abidin 1997; Raphael et al., 2010). Findings showed that parents experience stress due to behavioural or health issues, educational difficulties, and even everyday tasks of their child. It causes parenting-related stress which can escalate parental burnout (Roskam et al., 2018; Séjourné et al., 2018). COVID-19 and the related lockdown has found disruption in the daily routines of the families, family factors caused stress in a family environment, and parents struggled to handle childcare responsibilities (Pew Research Center, 2020a, b, & c). Chung et al. (2020) found that parenting stress was a significant mediator in the relationship between the perceived impacts of COVID-19. Tarsuslu et al. (2021) stated that during lockdown the days spent with their children strengthened their relationships with their children and it provided them with the opportunity to take better care of their children. Parenting is considered to be a primary source to contribute to the development of children (Karki et al., 2020). Positive parenting and self-care of parents would serve as a promotional and preventative intervention for child and adolescent mental health, especially during this crisis (Karki et al., 2020).

Studies have shown that parent-child conflicts are associated with parental stress (Vig & Jaswal, 2008) and predicted disruptive behaviours, ADHD, conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) comorbidity (Burt et al., 2003; El-Sheik & Elmore-Stratton, 2004), aggression and delinquency among children (Ingoldsby et al., 2006). The present study intends to understand the parents' experiences related to parenting and parent-child relationship during the COVID-19-related lockdown. As there were a few studies conducted in India to see the parental stress and parent-child relationship among parents during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study finding will help us to formulate promotional and preventative interventions for parents and children.

Aim: The present study assessed the parent-child relationship during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives

1. To assess the parental stress and parent-child relationship among parents during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To examine the correlation between parental stress, and parent-child relationship among parents during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The present study was an online cross-sectional survey carried out in India during the lockdown imposed by the government of India in the year 2020, among the parents; the questionnaire was converted into Google Forms and distributed via email, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, etc as well as social media platforms. The Google Forms link was created in the English language. The Google Forms link contained information regarding the survey and was then followed by a consent statement. Those

who read and accept to participate were redirected for further assessment. The information and consent page described the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and voluntary participation in the study. Also, participants were ensured that all the information provided to them will be kept confidential. Parents have children in the age range of 3-12 years and can read and understand the English language. The survey received around 512 responses out of which a total of 503 parents (mothers =247 and fathers = 256) were selected based on the inclusion criteria of the study.

Tools

1. **Semi-Structured Datasheet:** The semi-structured datasheet was developed to get the background of the participants (age, religion, education, occupation, income, etc.) and their parental experiences during COVID-19.
2. **Parental Stress Scale (PSS; Berry & Jones, 1995):** An 18-item five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). To compute the parental stress score, items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, and 18 should be reverse scored as follows: (1=5) (2=4) (3=3) (4=2) (5=1). The 8 positive items are reverse scored so that possible scores on the scale can range between 18-90. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater stress. Scoring for parental stress (the severity of stress is rated as: Mild – 18 to 42; Moderate – 43 to 66; Severe – 67 to 90 for parental stress scale). The internal reliability (0.83) and test-retest reliability (0.81) was found to be good.
3. **Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS; Pianta, 1992):** The CPRS is a 15 items self-report instrument self-report instrument completed by mothers or fathers that assesses their perceptions of their relationship with their son or daughter. It is measured or rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (definitely does not apply) to 5 (definitely applies), to assess a parent's perception of his or her relationship with a target child. The ratings can be summed into groups of items corresponding to conflict and closeness subscales. Closeness measures a parent's feelings of affection and open communication with his or her child. Conflict measures a parent's perception of negativity and conflict with the child. Higher scores on the closeness scale indicate a close relationship between parent and child, whereas higher scores on the conflict scale indicate a conflictual relationship. The reliability of the scale was found to be at Cronbach's alpha = 0.72; Conflict: alpha = 0.83.

Ethical consideration

The study was approved by the scientific committee of the Assam Nursing Institute, Titabor, Jorhat, Assam (Ref no. ANI/TTB/JHT/04/68/2020, dated: 06/04/2020). The ethical considerations were ensured during the study that the participants' rights, willingness, and confidentiality would be maintained. The virtual informed consent through Google Forms was taken from the participants before the assessment. Data collection started on 21st April 2020 and closed on 31st December 2020.

Statistical analysis

The statistical analyses were done with the help of the IBM SPSS 25.0 version. Frequency (f), percentage (%) used for the demographic data, parenting experiences and level of parental stress. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were used to assess the parent-child relationship and continuous variables. Pearson correlation (r) was used to see the relationship between parental stress, parent-child relationship and selected demographic variables. Regression analysis was done

to assess the predictive role of the parent-child relationship and selected demographic variables to parental stress.

RESULTS

Table 1

Socio-demographic profile of the participants

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age (in years)	42.02	10.067
Years of marriage	17.67	10.142
Number of children	2.23	3.151
Parent	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Father	247	49.1
Mother	256	50.9
Religion		
Hindu	380	75.5
Islam	79	15.7
Christian	40	8
Any other (please specify)	4	.8
Education		
Professional and post-graduate degree	60	11.9
Graduate degree	148	29.4
Pre-degree courses and diplomas	52	10.3
High school certificate	177	35.2
Primary education	66	13.1
Occupation		
Government employee	146	29
Health worker	31	6.2
Business/entrepreneur	94	18.7

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Agriculture	84	16.7
Housewife Homemaker	124	24.7
Skilled/ Semi-skilled worker	14	2.8
Non-career	10	2.0
Income (monthly in rupees)		
60,000 and above	49	9.7
50,000 to 60,000	31	6.2
40,000 to 50,000	54	10.7
30,000 to 40,000	47	9.3
20,000 to 30,000	62	12.3
10,000 to 20,000	81	16.1
Below 10,000	179	35.6

Note: $N= 503$, $n=$ Frequency, $\%=$ Percentage (100%), $M=$ Mean, $SD=$ Standard deviation

The mean age of the parents was 42.02 ($SD=10.067$) years. The average years of marriage were 17.16 ($SD=10.142$) years. The average number of children of participants was 2.23 ($SD=3.152$). Among the participants, almost half of them were mothers (50.9%) and fathers (49.1%), majority was Hindu (75.5%), and (35.2%) were educated up to high school. Majority were government employees (29%) followed by housewives or homemakers (24.7%), and majority (35.6%) of the participants had below 10,000 rupees monthly income (Table 1).

Table 2

Parental experiences during the lockdown period

Parental experiences	Rarely		Sometimes		A lot		Constantly	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Continually cleaning up messes of toys or food of your child(ren)	126	25	166	33	96	19.1	115	22.9
2. Kids won't listen or do what they are asked without being nagged	147	29.2	248	49.3	55	10.9	53	10.5
3. Kids demand that you entertain them or play with them	105	20.9	246	48.9	103	20.5	49	9.7
4. kids are constantly underfoot, interfering with other chores	166	33	242	48.1	41	8.2	54	10.7

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5. Need to keep a constant eye on where the kids are and what they are doing	128	25.4	166	33	94	18.7	115	22.9
6. Kids interrupt adult conversations or interactions	185	36.8	214	42.5	49	9.7	55	10.9

Note: $N= 503$, $n=$ frequency, $\%=$ percentage (100%)

Regarding the parental experiences, the constant experience of parents during the lockdown period, 22.9% of the parents were engaged continuously in cleaning up the mess of toys/food of their children. 10.5% of parents constantly experienced their children won't listen or do things without being nagged. 9.7% of parents reported that they constantly faced demands of children to entertain/play with them. 10.7% of parents constantly experienced that their children would interfere with their chores during the lockdown. 22.9% of parents shared that constantly they needed to keep eye on their children to see where they are and what are they doing. 10.9% of parents constantly experienced their children would interrupt adult conversation/interaction during the lockdown period (Table 2).

Table 3

Parental stress during the lockdown period

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parental Stress	46.423	8.486
Parental stress category	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Mild	169	33.6
Moderate	333	66.2
Severe	1	0.2

Note: $N= 503$, $n=$ frequency, $\%=$ percentage (100%), $M=$ mean, $SD=$ Standard deviation

During the lockdown period majority (66.2%) of the parent-reported moderate parental stress with a mean score of 46.423 with SD of 8.486 (Table 3).

Table 4

Parent-child relationship during the lockdown period

Parent-child relationship	M	SD
Conflict	23.793	7.839
Closeness	28.866	6.043

Note: N= 503, M= mean, SD= Standard deviation

The parent-child relationship scale revealed a higher mean score (M= 28.866 with SD of 6.043) in domain closeness (Table 4).

Table 5

Correlation between parental stress and parent-child relationship (conflict and closeness), age, years of marriage, and number of children

	Conflict	Closeness	Age	Years of marriage	Number of children
Parental stress	.525*** p=.001	-.294*** p=.001	-.188*** p=.001	-.122** p=.006	.083 p=.06

Note: N=503; significant level was at **0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 5 demonstrate that parental stress showed a significant positive correlation with conflict (r=.525, p<0.001) whereas a significant negative correlation was observed with closeness (r= -.294, p<0.001), age (r= -.188, p<0.001), year of marriage (r= -.122, p<0.01).

Table 6

Regression analysis of the parent-child relationship and parental stress

Multiple R	R ²	Adjusted	Standard
.704	.495	.490	6.05915

ANOVA Table

	Sum of square	df	Mean of square	F	significant
Regression	17910.309	5	3582.062	97.569	.001
Residual	18246.494	502	36.713		

Variables in the equation

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Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	significant t
Conflict	.687	.037	.635	18.707	.001***
Closeness	-.661	.047	-.470	-14.094	.001***
Age	-.071	.041	-.084	-1.720	.086
Years of marriage	-.021	.043	-.025	-.484	.629
Number of children	0.151	.095	.056	1.592	.112
Constant	52.142	1.996		26.126	.001

Note: N= 503, SE: Standard Error; significant at the level of 0.001 (2-tailed); ***p<0.001

Regression analysis was done to see the variance of the parent-child relationship, age, years of marriage and number of children to predict parental stress. Parental child relationship conflict (B=.687, t=18.707, p<0.001), closeness (B=-.661, t=-14.094, p<0.001) contribute significantly to the prediction of parental stress [F (5,502) = 235.550, p<0.001] accounting for 49.5% variance. The remaining 50.5% was attributed to a variable not included in the study (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

Every aspect of parents and their children's lives has been affected by COVID-19. Parents are facing various challenges in home schooling, child-care, and balancing work life which has contributed to increased parenting stress (Cuartas, 2020; Griffith, 2020; Humphreys et al., 2020). Parental stress has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and most children are staying home, it has affected the parent-child relationship and the child's risk of maltreatment is predicted to be increasing (Abramson, 2020). Studies have shown that parents had more conflicts with their children and yelled at their children more often during the pandemic and lockdown imposed during the pandemic (Brooks et al., 2020; Abramson, 2020). The finding from the present study shows that majority of participants had a moderate level of parental stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. The finding of the present study shows that parental stress had a significant positive correlation with conflict whereas, a significant negative correlation was observed with closeness. Brown et al. (2020) found that COVID-19 related stressors, high anxiety, and depressive symptoms are associated with higher perceived parental stress. They stated that greater parental support and perceived control during the pandemic are associated with lower perceived stress and child abuse potential. Wu and Xu (2020) stated that due to the pandemic, parents faced many difficulties and challenges (economic stress, challenges in home schooling, marital conflicts and intimate personal violence), and because of all these factors, there was parental stress and burnout which affected the parent-child relationship. In the study, it was found that parental-child relationships (conflict and closeness) contribute significantly to the prediction of parental stress. Chung et al. (2020) also found that parenting stress was a significant mediator in the relationship between the perceived impacts of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 and stay-home orders can increase parenting stress.

LIMITATIONS

This study's findings have certain limitations. Also, the survey was only administered in English, limiting the opportunity to capture the experiences of non-English speaking parents. The sample

included parents with a child in the age range of 3 to 12 years, children above 12 years were not included in the study; thus, this study included a small age range of children, which may influence the impact of COVID-19-related stressors in determining stress and parenting outcomes. In addition, this study was cross-sectional. Therefore, causal inferences cannot be made. Longitudinal research is needed to evaluate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on parents and children among different ethnic groups. Hence, more research is needed to better understand how children's age may influence parent stressors and child abuse potential during the COVID-19 pandemic.

IMPLICATIONS

The study results provide insight that parental experiences have been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19-related lockdown impacted the parent-child relationship therefore the present results are helpful to formulate programs for parents to uphold parenting and parent-child relationship during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic has potentially increased parental stress and the parent-child relationship. In addition, mental health professionals, and practitioners may explore and develop more effective interventions based on the implications of this study to better help parents and families deal with the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Acknowledgements: The researchers are appreciative of every resource and participant in support to achieve this study.

Conflict of Interest: None declared

Source of funding: Nil

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